



Strengthening **Communities**

Welcoming **Migration**

Leading **Innovation**



This project is co-financed by the
European Regional Development Fund's Urban
Innovative Actions initiative

@MiFriendlyWM

MiFriendly Cities

MiFriendly Cities

www.MiFriendlyCities.co.uk



What does MiFriendly Cities hope to achieve?

- That all communities in West Midlands MiFriendly Cities will see new opportunities open up for them.
- That migrants, including refugees, will feel that their contribution to social, economic and public life is supported, enhanced and recognised.
- Refugees and all migrants will feel empowered to access their civic and political rights.
- Prejudice and hostility towards migrants, including refugees, is effectively challenged and solidarity between the diverse communities in the West Midlands is strengthened.
- The construction of strong platforms for the voices, skills and passion of migrants, including refugees, so that all communities can be equally invested in the West Midlands' future.
- Innovation in grassroots and participatory approaches towards achieving measurable improvements in employment, skills, innovation, citizenship, public attitudes towards migration and investment in our communities.



Contents

[Forewords](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Our Partnership](#)

[About MiFriendly Cities](#)

[Jobs](#)

[Skills](#)

[Citizenship & voices](#)

[Startups & innovative ideas](#)

[Mifriendly futures](#)

[The MiFriendly timetable](#)

Navigating this guide



Use this button to return to the contents page



Next page



Previous page



Forewords

Coventry



Coventry has a proud history of opening its arms and welcoming those who choose to make the city their home. The cultural diversity of the city, and indeed the region, is something I personally treasure.

It has long been our message that refugees – and indeed all newcomers – to Coventry are made to feel welcome, and I am proud to say that we have been one of the lead cities in the resettlement of Syrian refugees. When Coventry was asked to provide shelter for refugees from one of the most savage conflicts of our times, the response was not ‘should we do this?’ it was ‘how do we do this well?’, something which has only ever been

possible by building cross-sector partnerships and working together.

This award of over £4million for the MiFriendly Cities project is a testament to the continuing efforts of the West Midlands to be forward-thinking in order to make migration work for everyone. Bringing together the three largest local authorities from within the region to work on such an innovative project, we are setting an example to authorities across the UK, and indeed the EU, to do more to unlock the skills of migrants in our cities.

I am excited that this project will look to create a sustainable framework which supports and promotes the integration of migrants, listens to communities, and celebrates the diversity of the region. It will enable us to recognise the valuable contribution that refugees and migrants make to our communities and help to find new ways to share this important message.

There will always be more we can do to make sure that we continue this message of inclusivity and diversity, but projects like this will ensure a legacy of migration support in the West Midlands for years to come.

**Councillor Abdul Salam Khan,
Coventry City Council Deputy Leader and
Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities**



West Midlands Combined Authority

“The West Midlands has always been a welcoming place for newcomers and it is wonderful that the MiFriendly Cities project will be able to build on that. It’s a brilliant example of a team coming together from across the West Midlands to take advantage of our diversity and create a community where everyone can thrive.

I am excited that this project will create opportunities for citizens to learn innovative new skills and take an active role in driving the economic success of the region forward. As a Combined Authority, we can be proud that we are taking these steps to future-proof the West Midlands by finding new ways to recognise the contribution of everyone in our communities.”

**Mayor Andy Street,
West Midlands Combined Authority**

Birmingham

A super-diverse city with a long history of welcoming people from all over the world, Birmingham is a place many choose to make their home. The range of cultures, languages and religions present and active in the city enriches its social, economic and political fabric and helps define what it means to live in Birmingham. The MiFriendly Cities project embodies these values and places them at the centre of its mission to support migrants themselves as well as private and statutory sectors to remove barriers and to unlock opportunity, for the benefit of all.

The new and innovative approaches to facilitating integration that are being championed by the MiFriendly Cities project are particularly timely in today's context, both of increased forced migration associated with recent and ongoing global conflict, and of the UK's approaching departure from the European Union. Now more than ever, it is important that residents in the West Midlands and elsewhere are equipped to access their rights, to enterprise and invest, to develop their potential, and to participate in the further enrichment of

the cultural, social and economic fabric of our cities.

Birmingham City Council is proud to be one of eleven partners bringing a range of expertise, skills and lived experience to the table in this unique, cross-sectoral partnership. The width and breadth of partners involved in the MiFriendly Cities collaboration will be central to its success not only in achieving its goals, but in embedding its values and learning into future practice.

**Councillor Tristan Chatfield,
Birmingham City Council Cabinet
Member for Social Inclusion,
Community Safety and Equalities**



Wolverhampton



The MiFriendly Cities project will see Coventry, Birmingham and City of Wolverhampton roll out a three-year programme of activities designed to help refugees and migrants feel that their contribution to society and the economy is valued. The project aims to bring new opportunities and benefits, and also improve integration in the West Midlands region via projects including language classes, employment support and the chance to learn new skills.

As well as introducing new initiatives, the project intends to improve existing networks across the three cities, supporting the work of the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP) and the region's two refugee and migrant centres.

In the City of Wolverhampton, it aims to highlight the positive impact that migrants have, and can have, across the City through targeted work such as home makeovers, furniture recycling, and being health champions. This is all aimed at providing a platform to improve community cohesion.

**Councillor Peter Bilson,
City of Wolverhampton Council
Deputy Leader and Cabinet
Member for City Assets
and Housing**



Introduction

About this Guide

In October 2017 the EU's **Urban Innovative Actions fund** awarded more than £4m to Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton for the MiFriendly Cities project. This is a 3-year initiative that will look to develop innovative, community-led and sustainable approaches to enhancing and recognising the contributions of refugees and migrants and improving the lives of all residents across the region.

This Introductory Guide brings together information about the MiFriendly concept, partners, activities and action plan, and also includes an overview of migration in the West Midlands region. The Guide will be useful reading for anyone in the UK or within Europe who is interested in developing a similar programme or learning more about our region. We will publish a further, more detailed, Guide towards the end of the funding programme.





In MiFriendly Cities, we have brought together a diverse and innovative partnership of three local authorities (Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton), a local university and its social enterprise partner (Coventry University and Coventry University Social Enterprises), four local and national NGOs which deliver services and activities as well as advocate for migrants (Refugee and Migrant Centre Wolverhampton and the Black Country, Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, Central England Law Centre, Migrant Voice), a leading multinational company (Interserve), and (MigrationWork) a not-for-profit consultancy set up to help communities, practitioners and policymakers to respond to migration.

Working together will allow us to capitalise on each organisation's strengths and knowledge. The project will deliver an exciting programme of activities designed to create opportunities and to push the boundaries – including our own – of what has been previously attempted in the EU.

MiFriendly Cities builds on the region's many recent successes. With Coventry set to become **City of Culture in 2021** and Birmingham's successful bid to host the next **Commonwealth Games** the West Midlands has a unique opportunity to become a hub for cultural and economic innovation in Europe.



A MiFriendly City is where...

- The city benefits from all the talents and potential of all its residents, and everyone's contribution is nurtured, recognised and valued.
- Refugees and migrants contribute to the city's civic, economic and social fabric
- Refugees and migrants are empowered to access their rights and feel like fully-fledged citizens.
- Hostility and prejudice towards and migrants is minimised and solidarity within communities is strengthened.
- A holistic approach is taken to developing activities across all areas of life.

The Participatory MiFriendly Vision

Most critically to our vision, refugees and migrants have been involved at every step of project development. We believe in a 'two-way integration process', which is multi-faceted, multi-layered and which takes into account the whole community. From the grassroots upwards, we hope to see citizens across the community working with local businesses, government, and voluntary organisations to build a Migration Friendly region together.

By developing a project in this way, we hope to see a region where everyone is encouraged to become an active citizen, training and employment opportunities are created, and the contributions of refugees and migrants are supported, enhanced and recognised. While some activities will be tailored to specific groups, our overall programme will involve a broad range of residents in the region, including many different kinds of people who define themselves as 'migrant'.

Our exciting 3-year project will be shaped and developed by the communities involved. We hope that this will create a culture of inclusion and friendliness, with the West Midlands becoming a region in which all of its residents feel a true sense of belonging.



MiFriendly Cities is funded by Urban Innovative Actions

This programme is funded by the **Urban Innovative Actions (UIA)**, an initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges. Approximately 359 million people – 72% of the total EU population – live in cities, towns and suburbs. Urban areas face multiple and interconnected challenges related to employment, migration, demography, water, and soil pollution. But, they are also engines of new ideas and solutions, dynamic places where changes happen on a larger scale and at a fast pace.

To answer the increasingly complex challenges they face, urban authorities need to go beyond traditional policies and services – they need to be bold and innovative. Although research on urban issues is well developed, potential solutions are not always put into practice because urban authorities are reluctant to use their money to test new, unproven and hence risky ideas. Urban Innovative Actions offers urban authorities the possibility to take a risk and experiment with the most innovative and creative solutions and see how these work in practice and respond to the complexities of real life.

MiFriendly Cities is one of three projects funded under the **2017-2020 Integrating Refugees and Migrants Funding Call**.

“MiFriendly Cities innovation directly concerns building an integrated community in the West Midlands, benefiting from the competencies of newcomers and long-time residents alike. Positioning migrant and refugees as assets to their region rather than as problems to be solved is a very strong point in the Urban Innovative Action appreciation of the MiFriendly Cities proposal, especially where migrants and refugees become pro-active partners in the integration process. There is a strong expectation that the model which will be worked out will help many other cities to do likewise”.

Peter Wolkowski, UIA expert

This project is innovative because...

- Refugees and migrants will themselves drive change.
- Migrants and refugees will work on developing projects which will benefit the whole community; we will not discriminate in the categories of people we work with.
- The project is built on a spirit of solidarity which we are aiming to ripple out through the West Midlands under the banner of ‘MiFriendly Cities’.
- Refugees and migrants are recognised as citizens of the West Midlands.
- Partnerships will be built between local citizens, civil society, industry and government.





Our Partnership

We believe one of the key strengths of MiFriendly Cities is the unique diversity of the partnership which underpins it.



Coventry City Council is the lead authority for MiFriendly Cities and is overseeing the project implementation whilst also having an active role in the programme. Coventry is a City of Sanctuary and a proud multicultural city – with a third of the 360,100 people who live here being from Black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds – and our involvement in this project affirms the Council's on-going commitment to embracing diversity, building community cohesion, improving the quality of life for its residents, and creating new jobs and infrastructure. Coventry is set to become **UK City of Culture in 2021**, is a recognised **International City of Peace and Reconciliation**, and is home to major UK employers – including Jaguar Land Rover and Severn Trent – and two award-winning universities.



Birmingham City Council is taking an active role in leading and implementing MiFriendly City activities, which will be integrated with the Council's other programmes in this area, including its support of **Birmingham City of Sanctuary**, and **Community Cohesion Strategy** which sets out proposals for a collaborative approach in which the City Council works alongside residents, local organisations and city partners to ensure Birmingham is a place where people from different backgrounds can come together to improve things for themselves. The eight guiding principles in the Strategy, identified during conversations last year with partners, communities and young people are: to make community cohesion everyday business; connect and exchange ideas that promote community cohesion and mobilise social action; nurture and support the aspirations of young people; to promote citizens' rights and responsibilities; to progress equality in all spheres of social and economic life; to promote inclusive economic growth that benefits everyone across Birmingham; to empower and engage neighbourhoods; and to bring people together through art, culture and sports.



City of Wolverhampton Council has a long history of welcoming people from all over the world to start a new life in the West Midlands, including through its recognition as a City of Sanctuary. Through MiFriendly Cities, the Council is working to improve the skills and employability of migrants through a new pop-up furniture factory in the city. This investment will enable participants to learn new skills or upskill and contribute to home-makeovers in the region. The City of Wolverhampton will benefit from a range of new programmes to improve opportunities, employability and the wellbeing of its migrant communities.



Coventry University Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) undertakes innovative, impactful, world-class research that enables dialogue and builds trust in order to foster peaceful relations and strengthen human security. CTPSR will lead the evaluation of MiFriendly Cities and will support MiFriendly City students to acquire new skills and accreditation through a new Citizen Social Science course, the Digital Fabrication Laboratory, pop-up furniture factory and health champion training to be delivered by the faculty of Health and Life Science.



Migrant Voice works to develop the skills, capacity and confidence of migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees, to tell their stories in the media and civil society to counteract xenophobia, and develop understanding and support for migrants' rights. Migrant Voice will be running 'the Media Lab': group media training and one-one mentoring with media experts and journalists to support the production of videos, photos, articles, and social media as well as provide opportunities for migrants to speak out in the media.



Refugee and Migrant Centre, Black Country & Birmingham assists refugees and migrants through crisis and disadvantage, by removing barriers to their integration and enabling them to become equal citizens. RMC's seamless and comprehensive approach covers many issues related to the settlement and integration of new and emerging communities. Through their service delivery they aim to contribute to an improvement in the quality of life of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants; as well as to contribute to the settlement and integration of refugees and migrants living in the Black Country and Birmingham. Through MiFriendly Cities, RMC will provide a holistic integration service and support which is underpinned by sustainable employment, healthy lifestyle advice, knowledge sharing and ESOL (English as a Second Language) provision.



Interserve is the only corporate organisation within the partnership. Interserve is passionate about social inclusion and social mobility. As a major West Midlands employer, they are using this passion to offer work placements to participants of the programme, which will hopefully lead to future employment opportunities. Interserve will also undertake mentoring sessions with participants. As a large national employer and more specifically a large West Midlands employer, alongside their support for social inclusion and mobility, they aim to leverage this presence and passion to show other West Midlands employers the benefits of the programme, seek wider engagement and thus create additional opportunities for participants. Working with other programme partners, they will create an Employers' Guide, which will contain advice and guidance on recruiting refugees and migrants. Available in digital format, it will also contain the latest employment law guidance, which will be continually reviewed and updated as required.



Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre is a hub of excellence for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, the centre enables them to feel safe, supported and empowered to aid their integration. To help refugees and migrants to make the UK their new safe home, and enable them to become contributing members of society as part of the community and economy. CRMC have over 20 years of experience in working directly with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. Their main objective is to provide pivotal services that empower communities to make informed decisions to enable them to fulfil their full potential. This project will enable this to happen on a regional scale, and CRMC's role is to provide participants for all project activities, as well as to be involved in the delivery of every aspect.



MigrationWork is a not-for-profit consultancy set up to help communities, practitioners and policy-makers to respond to migration, in ways that ensure both migrant and 'host' communities can benefit from this process and move towards integration. They are leading the communications work and will make sure that they learn from innovation across Europe and share anything they learn from their activities far and wide. They will be supporting migrants in the West Midlands to pitch for funding for new ideas that will facilitate integration and benefit the whole community.



CU Social Enterprise (CUSE) offers businesses with economic and social benefit the opportunity to work with the University whilst also helping to develop the entrepreneurial skills of students, staff and alumni. CUSE's MiFriendly Cities activity will be targeted at promoting, raising awareness of and building the market for refugee and migrant social enterprises within the West Midlands.



Central England Law Centre (CELC) with bases in Coventry and in Birmingham, provides free specialist legal advice to those most in need and uses legal processes to fight social exclusion. In addition to providing immigration and asylum advice, our expert caseworkers help people with housing, employment and welfare benefits amongst other issues, enabling us to facilitate a holistic service. CELC will implement a rights initiative for MiFriendly Cities, and develop their work in schools to help children and young people gain citizenship.



About MiFriendly Cities

MiFriendly Cities will incubate new and innovative approaches to alleviate some of the pressures experienced by local authorities who are expected to do more with significantly less funding. We hope that our MiFriendly partnership which encompasses local residents, civil society, industry and government and our learning as to how a region can be shaped and strengthened by its diversity, will act as a blueprint for similar cities across Europe. Our multi-agency, bottom-up, approach goes beyond those which have traditionally been deployed. We believe that we are pushing the boundaries of local and regional-level migration initiatives.

The West Midlands authorities are exploring investment in MiFriendly Cities as a long-term initiative which incorporates new and sustainable ways of working together beyond the three years of funding. We are hoping to restructure the traditional services offered by local authorities to suit the needs of a forward-thinking region, and ultimately putting the West Midlands on the map for cultural and economic innovation.

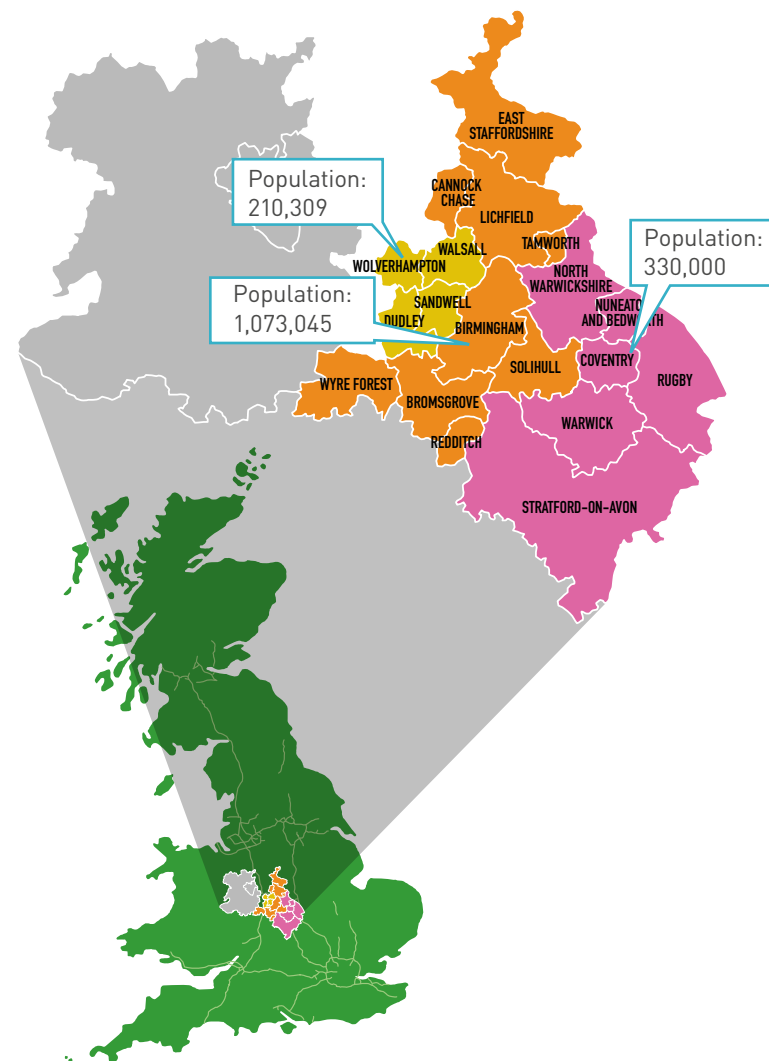
Our MiFriendly Region

MiFriendly Cities is based in the West Midlands region, home to 5,800,743 people who speak over 100 different languages on our streets daily. The region is an exciting and 'super diverse' region with a thriving civil society, and a colourful cultural life. We have a strong sense of pride in place and highly developed local identities, making the region an ideal incubator for the concept of MiFriendly Cities.

Demographically, the West Midlands is the 5th largest region by population after the South East, London, North West and the East of England. Highly urbanised, the region contains the cities of Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton as well as several other towns including Dudley, Solihull, Walsall, West Bromwich, and rural western counties of Shropshire and Herefordshire. It is the second most diverse region in the UK (after Greater London), with Birmingham the second most populous city.¹

- Our region is dynamic. We are a young population - 40% of the population of Birmingham is aged under 25: the youngest population in Europe. We are also growing, from inward migration from elsewhere in the UK and from other countries as well as a high birth rate.
- We are also home to a growing economy with a strong manufacturing history and track record in **economic innovation**.

- Our region is 'super-diverse' with over 100 languages spoken by our residents daily.



1 Census 2011

2 ONS Local Area Migration Statistics, August 2017 cited in WMSPMP

3 WMSMP Migration Report

4 Office of National Statistics Annual Population Survey June 2017

5 Calculated as those receiving Section 95 support



In 2016 there was a net inflow of just over **29,500** international migrants into the West Midlands region – with nearly **49,200** new arrivals and just over **19,600** leaving²



Within the region, the urban areas of Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton saw particularly significant numbers of international arrivals in 2016 (nearly 15,000, 9,000 and 3,000 respectively)³



In 2016 the region was home to up to **285,000** nationals of other EU countries (especially Poland, Romania, Bulgaria)⁴



Since 2015, **472** Syrian refugees have been resettled in the West Midlands

People who migrate from outside the UK to the West Midlands come to work, study, and join family members. They also come to the UK because they are fleeing persecution, human rights abuses or conflict and have claimed asylum, or because they have been resettled here.

Since 2000, the UK government has dispersed people who seek asylum in the UK to regions outside London and the South East. Individuals must continue to reside in their allocated region while their asylum claim is considered. In 2015, there were 5,031 asylum seekers resident in the West Midlands.⁵ This includes 1,775 asylum seekers in Birmingham, 689 in Wolverhampton and 551 in Coventry. Local authorities do not have a formal role in considering asylum claims or supporting asylum seekers. Housing is provided

by a private company under contract to the UK Home Office and asylum applications are handled nationally by the Home Office. Local authorities must, however, agree to receive asylum seekers and must manage issues to do with local integration.

The UK refugee resettlement schemes operate through a system of voluntary local government participation funded by central government. Refugees are resettled from the Syrian border region – specifically from Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt and Iraq - where there are large numbers of Syrian refugees. Children are also resettled from Northern Africa. Resettled individuals are selected according to UNHCR's vulnerability criteria, as well as on the basis of UK security and public health eligibility criteria.



EUROPEAN UNION
European Regional Development Fund

Challenges in the West Midlands

The West Midlands faces five key external and internal challenges which will especially impact on already marginalised populations, in particular migrants. Our aim is that MiFriendly Cities will help to mitigate the impacts associated with these.

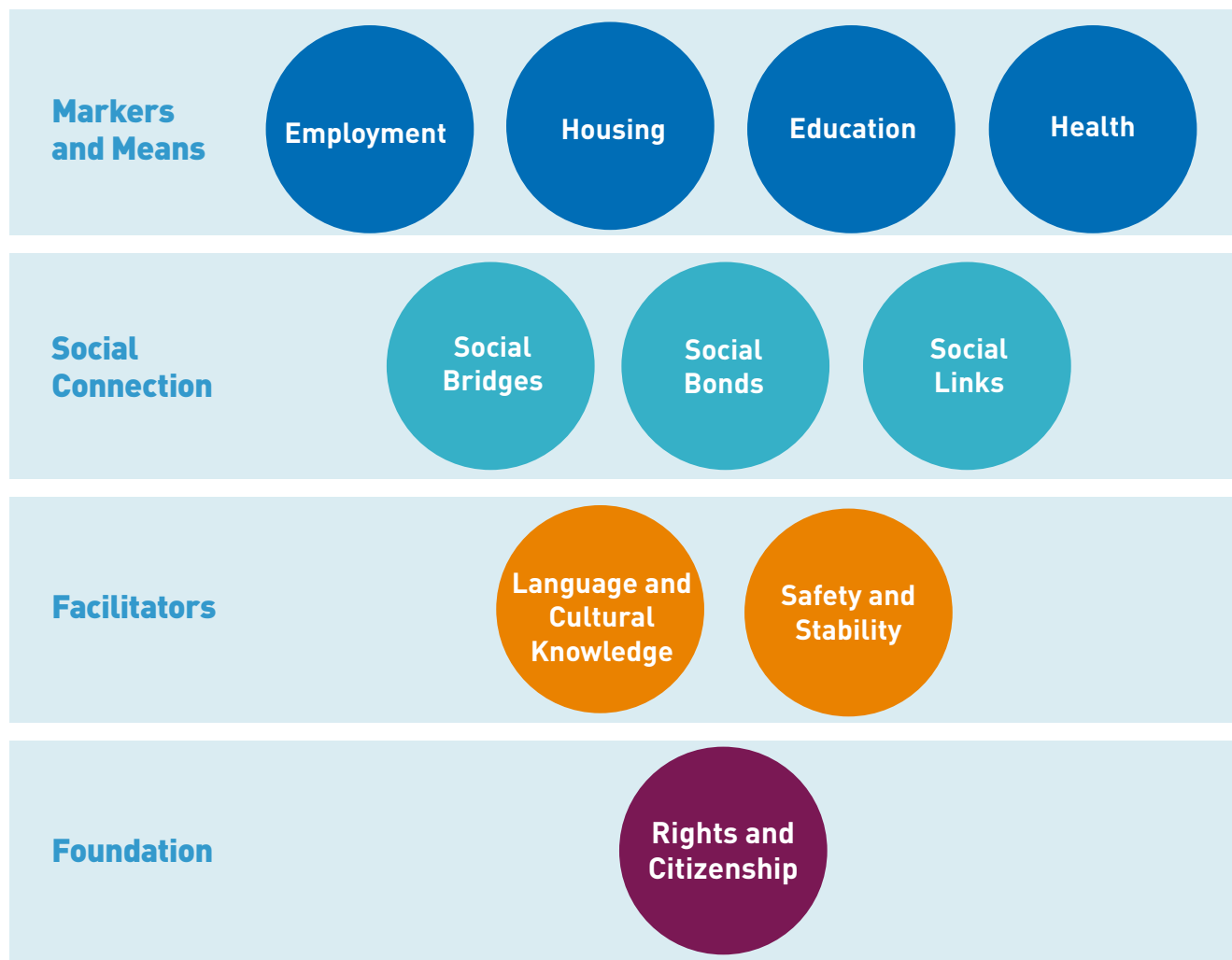
- 1 The UK leaves the EU in March 2019 with, at the time of writing, no exit deal agreed. This leaves the West Midlands – as all regions in the UK – in a period of great uncertainty. It is expected that Brexit will have a greater negative economic effect here compared with other areas of the UK, including on jobs and wages, impacting on those who are in insecure, precarious employment and those who are already struggling to find employment. As it stands, the long-term future residency and employment arrangements of EU nationals who live and work in the region are uncertain. For employers, which in many sectors are already struggling to find sufficient workers, the loss of more EU nationals from the West Midlands workforce is likely to have a serious impact on recruitment and therefore productivity.
- 2 Research conducted before and after the 'Brexit Referendum' shows that for Leave voters, opposition to immigration was an important factor,⁶ as was economic dissatisfaction.⁷ A majority in the West Midlands voted Leave: in Coventry 55% voted Leave, 50.4% in Birmingham, and 62.6% in Wolverhampton. Subsequently, reported hate crime has increased. Between 2015 and 2018, West Midlands Police Force recorded a 28% increase in hate crime reports (the majority accounted for by racially and religiously motivated crimes).⁸
- 3 In recent years the West Midlands economy has recovered strongly from the recession of 2008- 2009. Since then, employment levels have risen by more than 180,000 (8%) and are now well above those pre-recession. However, while substantial numbers of jobs have been created in all occupations, the proportion in lower skilled operative and elementary roles (21%) is well above the UK average (17%). Migrants disproportionately work in these low paid and casualised, jobs.
- 4 Accessing paid employment is one of the key factors alongside accessing housing, education and health which supports the effective integration of migrants into the local community, through enabling people to support themselves, to make connections and to learn new skills. However, refugees find it especially hard to find employment. In Birmingham, up to 65% of male refugees and up to 80% of female refugees face unemployment.⁹ Of migrants from countries outside of the EU, only 58% are in paid employment, compared to 71% of the UK population. A greater proportion (over a third) are economically inactive, compared to 24% of the population as a whole.
- 5 Central government austerity cuts to local authority budgets are proving extremely challenging. In recent months the government's official spending watchdog, the National Audit Office, has warned that local councils in England are at breaking point. Councils have seen their central government funding halved since 2010 at the same time as demand for their services has continued to rise.¹⁰ Between 2010/11 and 2015/16, English local authorities have had to cut spending on local services by 27% in real terms. As councils spend 88% of their income on services used by those who are most in need (e.g. adult social care, children's social care, home care, homelessness, public transport, English as a second language provision), inevitably councils have faced severe challenges when trying to shield the vulnerable from the impact of cuts.¹¹

Developing the Project

MiFriendly Cities is innovative, but it is also evidence-based. We have built on learning from elsewhere to develop our project. To build our MiFriendly Region we will learn from the well-established and innovative **Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities**, of which we have valuable, internationally-recognised experience in implementing in **Coventry**.

The global network of Age-Friendly Cities supports the implementation of activities that are driven by local residents and grassroots activities, but which are also supported by a strong governance model. In an Age-Friendly City, policies, services and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to support and enable older people to “age actively” – that is, to live in security, enjoy good health and continue to participate fully in society.

MiFriendly Cities is also theory-based. Underpinning MiFriendly Cities is Agar and Strang’s Integration Framework¹² which, drawing on decades of empirical research, sets out the key indicators by which refugees can feel better integrated into local communities. The following diagram sets out the key components to this.



- 6 M.J. Creighton, J. Amaney, Masked intolerance toward immigrants in the UK before and after the vote to leave the EU Understanding Society Scientific Conference. July 2017, University of Essex (2017) Unpublished conference paper)
 - 7 F. Liberini, A.J. Oswald, E. Proto, M. Redoano Was Brexit Caused by the Unhappy and the Old? IZA Discussion Paper No. 11059 (2017)
 - 8 [Golledge \(2017\) Hate crime up 28 percent across West Midlands. Express and Star](#)
 - 9 <https://rise-project.eu/ie/analysis>
 - 10 [NAO \(2018\) Financial sustainability of local authorities 2018. National Audit Office. London.](#)
 - 11 [A. Hastings, N. Bailey, G. Bramley, M. Gannon, D. Watkins \(2015\) The Cost of the Cuts: The impact on local government and poorer communities. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.](#)
 - 12 Alistair Agar and Alison Strang (2004) Indicators of Integration. London: Home Office.
- Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities [Age-Friendly Coventry](#)



Implementing MiFriendly Cities in the West Midlands

Drawing on both Age-Friendly Cities as well as the refugee and migrant integration literature, MiFriendly Cities should be - we believe, underpinned by the voices, skills and passion of refugees and migrants themselves so that all are fully invested in its future. Consultations with grassroots organisations to develop this proposal were therefore used to help us identify what together we think should be the foundational themes: jobs, social enterprise & innovation, active citizenship, communication and long-term community investment. We have drawn on this bottom-up approach to develop 'baskets' of creative, innovative and exciting activities which push the boundaries of what has previously been attempted.

- 1 We will work with – and alongside – all categories of migrants in different activities, including refugees, non-EU migrants (third country nationals), and in some cases, EU nationals and UK citizens. Taking such an open approach has been critical to the development of a project which has solidarity and a welcoming approach at its core.
- 2 We aim to create new job opportunities for refugees and migrants, better match their skills with employers and upskill employers to better engage with refugees and migrants. A leading company headquartered in the region – Interserve – will establish a Business Leaders'

Forum and toolkit for other employers in the region, while driving change through the Local Economic Partnerships. The programme also includes training courses for refugees and migrants in advanced digital manufacturing, identified in the West Midlands Regional Economic Plan as an aspirational sector as well as a skills gap. Our activities will create lasting infrastructure which will drive significant change in regional labour markets, and ultimately contribute to powering the economic success of the West Midlands region.

3 We will also implement activities which support active citizenship and rights, a cornerstone of democracy as well as of grassroots integration. A rights initiative is being developed by the Law Centre (CELC) which actively supports those in need of legal advice, provides accessible resources and works directly with organisations to identify and refer migrant communities to further rights support. Community 'Health Champions' will be trained and accredited to enable the sharing of vital health messages at a community-level. We will also take this grassroots approach to communications, with over 100 refugees and migrants trained as Citizen Journalists to engage with the mainstream media, create their own stories and media channels, including a MiFriendly Cities YouTube channel.

4 We will encourage refugees and migrants to apply for training and mentoring in social enterprise, as well as expert workshops in developing community-based social innovation projects. We have allocated start-up funding for which enterprise trainees can apply to put

their ideas into practice. We will also invite local migrant communities, including refugees, to apply for a small grant to develop a project in healthcare, housing, employment or active citizenship, encouraging ideas which tackle our main challenges, and which engender solidarity between communities. We envisage that this will be an important, innovative way of investing in our local populations and encouraging community innovation.

5 Finally, thirty trained, accredited and mentored Citizen Social Scientists will help us develop and implement an evaluation to ensure that refugees and migrants are centre-stage in the learning which emerges from the project. This, coupled with an expert 'sounding board' set up to share and extract knowledge and similar practices from similar cities will ensure the development of an innovative and tested project which is transferable to cities across Europe.

The project is presented as 5 'themes', within which we have many activities for refugees and migrants, 'host communities', employers and voluntary sector organisations to get involved with.





Jobs

Jobs are critical to the ability of refugees and migrants to integrate into an area: they are essential for economic survival, self-esteem, learning English and for making friends.

According to a survey carried out by Coventry University and Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, 4 out of 5 businesses are finding it hard to recruit staff. This is likely to worsen after Brexit, because of the significance of the EU workforce in the region. Yet we know that there are untapped skills among refugee and migrant populations across the West Midlands which could help employers meet this workforce gap. We also know employers lack knowledge about the availability of skills among refugee and migrant populations and are fearful about hiring individuals who do not have UK passports.



We want to create a network of 'Migration Friendly Employers' whose common goal will be to strengthen the workforce of the West Midlands, creating an infrastructure which opens up opportunities, offers ongoing support and increases contact between different communities in the workplace. To have the most success in increasing their employment, it is necessary to engage with employers as well as with refugees and migrants. In including a major multinational employer in the project, MiFriendly Cities is testing out its innovativeness.

Working directly with employers, we aim to increase their knowledge of the available skills within refugee and migrant populations as well help them with more innovative recruitment techniques which reach into these communities. To mitigate employers' fears about hiring individuals whose legal right to work they are unsure about, we will facilitate educational discussions about how to hire refugees and migrants legally, focusing our activities on SME (small and medium sized enterprises) which lack human resource capacity and legal knowledge. We hope that employers will feel comfortable in engaging with MiFriendly Cities through Interserve's leadership of these activities.

Led by Interserve, we will...

- Work with local and national employers to create sustainable work placements and apprenticeships for refugees and migrants.
- Develop a mentoring programme, with existing and retired employees supporting refugees & migrants through placements and towards employment.
- Hold employment advice sessions in accessible community spaces in each city, working with residents to establish and reach their employment goals, referring to other project activities and linking into the employment activities of Coventry, Wolverhampton and Birmingham City Councils.
- Produce a digital guide and convene Business Forums for employers to inform them about the availability of skills and workers from refugees and migrant communities
- Support new 'employment broker' posts within RMC and CRMC who will be tasked with connecting refugees and migrants with employers.

15

**new work placements
with Interserve**

100

**new apprenticeships, training
and job opportunities**

300

**refugees and migrants mentored
and supported by volunteers**

2,000

**employers reached by
employment brokers**



Skills

Since 2009, central government moved to devolve some additional powers away from London to England's regions. In the West Midlands, the Combined Authority represents the 18 local authorities (including Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton) and 4 Local Enterprise Partnerships (voluntary partnerships between local authorities and businesses to help determine local economic priorities and lead economic growth and job creation within the local area). In line with being evidence-based, the MiFriendly Cities project has been developed to align with the **Combined Authority Strategic Economic Plan (SEP)** which sets out their vision for improving the quality of life for everyone in the West Midlands, a focus on skills and innovation being adopted as key pillars for this initiative. We envisage that aligning our activities with the regional economic plan right from the start will help us to structurally embed our work and our successes.

- o 6,000 advanced engineering firms are based in the West Midlands
- o The region accounts for 25% of all automotive production in the UK
- o The region contains more medical technology firms than any other in the UK, the largest number of start-ups outside the capital and has a thriving wholesale and retail trade sector.¹³
- o In 2015, Birmingham's productivity (GVA) figure was £24.8bn with a growth rate of 5.2%, double that of the UK rate
- o More foreign businesses invested here in 2015 than anywhere outside London and the South East.¹⁴

We will...

- Train refugees and migrants in digital manufacturing techniques and create two '**Mobile FabLabs**' to provide open and widespread access to modern means of invention and encourage manufacturing pathways for migrants and young people.
- Run home improvement skills (DIY) workshops with the help of local volunteers, from Interserve and other employers with whom the project is in contact.

- We will establish a 'pop-up furniture factory' which will be used to house the DIY workshops and provide 'MiFriendly Makeovers' to homes of older and vulnerable people. Pop-up furniture factories have been acclaimed for providing jobs and skills for local populations, as well as contributing to economic regeneration.
- We will also set up community **repair cafés** in each city, establishing free meeting places containing tools, materials and support to help local people make any repairs needed. Expert volunteers will assist people to repair items such as clothes, furniture, electrical appliances, bicycles, crockery, appliances and toys.
- We will train and accredit refugees and migrants as 'Citizen Social Scientists' to evaluate and strengthen the MiFriendly Cities project. This form of participatory social research engages the wider public directly in the research process, and civic engagement is at its core. It assumes that 'expert knowledge' is not produced exclusively in the ivory towers of scientific institutions, but most effectively in collaborations with members of the public. Through enabling and utilising participatory approaches we can better address social address un-researched areas which may otherwise go 'unnoticed' and facilitate the empowerment of the individuals we engage.

250

migrants trained in digital manufacturing techniques

100

migrants mentored in painting, decorating and DIY skills

3

community repair cafés set up in 3 cities

30

accredited community researchers

¹³ <https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/strategy>

¹⁴ [West Midlands Strategic Economic Plan](#)



Citizens & voices

Rights & active citizenship

Rooted in the experience – and evidence – of our NGO partners in the project, we know that being informed about your civic, political and legal rights is a cornerstone for active citizenship. In keeping with the MiFriendly approach, we want refugees and migrants to feel confident in accessing these rights, represent themselves and feel that they are fully-fledged citizens across all areas of life. We are concerned with all rights and will especially offer legal support for immigration, housing, welfare and employment to all project participants as well as their families. This goes to the heart of our holistic approach within the project. For participants to be successfully engaged in project activities aimed at helping them integrate, they need to know that their immigration status, their housing, and their welfare benefits – where these apply – are secure. And not only for project participants: if family members have support needs which are not met, the engagement of project participants may wane and placements may break down. In taking this holistic approach, MiFriendly Cities is especially innovative; we believe that rights should be the bedrock of all our activities. For non-participants and the wider community at large, we have developed a series of rights' guides translated into several languages which will also sign-post to legal support across key areas.



Migrant voices

We want to empower refugees and migrants to speak for themselves, Challenging negative public attitudes on migration, addressing racism and increasing solidarity among our communities in the West Midlands is a core aspiration of the project.

In the words of Nazek Ramadan, Director of Migrant Voice: **“it is so important that we pursue creative ways to challenge division and bring people together: when migrants are listened to and our contribution valued the whole community benefits.”**

A recent study conducted by Coventry University¹⁵ found that:

- o Migrants are only referenced in 15% of newspaper articles on migration and that 85% of articles do not have a migrant perspective.
- o Migrant voices are more likely to be included in stories which tend towards more positive, sympathetic or humanising portrayals of migration and a majority of these presented the migrant as a victim in need of sympathy and support.
- o By contrast migrant voices are less likely to be present in stories which tend towards more negative views of migration and migrants.
- o The study concludes that a narrow view of migrants as victims may reinforce dominant stereotypes in ways that are not helpful in the longer term, and that if the migration debate is to be more balanced and reflect the lived reality of migrants in Britain, it must include a wider range of evidence, views and perspectives.

We will...

- Offer legal casework support to project participants and their families so that they are able to engage in project activities.
- Develop a multi-language ‘Know Your Rights’ initiative to promote rights awareness in employment, housing, immigration and welfare.
- Work with schools and children’s centres to offer legal casework to enable paths to citizenship for young people who need this help.
- Create an ‘opportunities map’ which helps refugees and migrants navigate how to have a say in local and national decision-making, from accessing your local Member of Parliament, to complaining about (or complementing) local public services, to joining a trade union, to influencing your local authority.
- Train migrant health champions to go into their communities to deliver essential public health messages to help marginalised communities and those who are new to the UK to access primary care services.
- Offer free English language classes and ‘Share my Language’ activities, bringing together refugee and migrant communities with student and community volunteers to share English and other languages over tea and friendship.
- Run a community media lab, supported by volunteer journalists and bloggers, to create Citizen Journalists, providing the skills and platforms for refugees and migrants to use their

voices and share their own positive stories, as well as to generate their own media content.

- Develop a ‘MiFriendly Cities’ touring exhibition on the theme of: “What does a MiFriendly City mean to you?” Content will be generated by project participants (especially Citizen Journalists and Citizen Social Scientists), as well as the wider communities and curated with the help of an artist.’

100

refugees and migrants trained to tell their stories

6,000

public health messages transmitted across the region

500

English as a Second Language (ESOL) classes

115

schools and children’s centres reached

¹⁵ <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directories/research-news/2016/victims-and-villains>



Startups & innovative ideas

When building the framework for MiFriendly Cities we identified social enterprise and grassroots participatory mobilisation as being key to building and investing in creative, sustainable cities in which understanding between communities is bridged.

Social enterprises exist in nearly every sector from consumer goods to healthcare, community energy to creative agencies, restaurants to facilities management. A recently published report by **Social Enterprise UK**, entitled the **Hidden Revolution**, highlighted that there are around 100,000 social enterprises, contributing £60bn to the UK economy and employing 2m people. According to the report the top five cooperatives in the UK pay more tax than Amazon, Facebook, Apple, eBay and Starbucks combined.¹⁶

¹⁶ Coventry University Business Blog November 2018



Yet the sector has limited involvement from migrant and refugee communities, with lack of access to credit, and religious, gender and language identified as barriers. Activities will be targeted at promoting, raising awareness of and building the market for refugee and migrant social enterprises and nurturing ideas towards the creation of social innovation projects.

Grassroots mobilisation is essential to building community solidarity around themes of relevant local interest, and establishing bottom-up participatory approaches all areas is critical to our model. By supporting local and refugee and migrant entrepreneurs to start-up viable businesses, we are contributing to an expansion of job opportunities in the region as well as a strengthened economy bolstered by small, socially-aware businesses. We are also looking to unlock ideas from, what we feel, is an untapped resource within this group, funding the development of creative grassroots community projects which meet social challenges in local communities. These projects will continue to build on the theme of MiFriendly Cities and our aims of increased understating and solidarity in communities beyond the life of the project.

We will...

- Fund and offer mentoring for up to 16 Social Enterprises, teaching business planning, finance, and marketing skills. CU Social Enterprise will deliver training to 40 participants and support them to develop viable business ideas which meet social challenges in the West Midlands.
- Selected successful enterprise ideas will be provided with up to £5,000 award to include investment, resources, and expert advice support from a local mentor for up to one year to become self-sustaining businesses.
- Inspire people with examples of social innovation from around Europe and develop, and mentor up to 15 grassroots projects which will address issues such as housing, employment, access to health care and community empowerment; groups will be invited to apply for funds from a small grant pot (up to £3,000 each).
- Create opportunities to work for one of three new social enterprises created for the project by CRMC, and which are linked to service industries including food preparation and service, and laundry services.

£80,000

financial investment fund for up to 16 new businesses

£90,000

social innovation scheme to boost the 'MiFriendliness' of the West Midlands

1

refugee and migrant recruitment agency to support 3 new businesses



MiFriendly futures

We aim to create a lasting infrastructure which will ultimately contribute to powering the economic success of the West Midlands and enable cultural and social change. The project will look to invest in the future of our region and inspire cities across Europe to become the MiFriendly Cities of the future. We will do this through making lasting investment as well as evaluating and sharing our learning.

Community investment:

Three major investments will ensure that the MiFriendly initiative can continue for years to come.

- Renovation of the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre to create a new community hub which will host exhibitions, provide space for local community groups, convene events.
- Investment in woodworking equipment and repair tools for our Pop-up Furniture Factory to teach DIY skills and provide community homemakers.
- Two 'Mobile FabLabs' to teach digital manufacturing techniques in spaces that are accessible for all.

One of our key goals is to hard-bake long-term sustainability into the MiFriendly Cities programme. This includes ensuring that we generate structural change across the region: that the local authorities and key stakeholders (from statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors) work together to achieve and maximise our MiFriendly vision. To do this we will work together with the **West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership** which provides political oversight and support in managing migration at regional level.

We also work with the Coventry Migration Network, formed in 2016 to bring together organisations in the city who are working with refugees, migrants and asylum seekers allowing a space to spark conversation and exchange. In Birmingham, we are engaging with Birmingham Migration Forum which similarly enables networking between the relevant organisations in the city, and in Wolverhampton with the Community Cohesion Forum.

Sharing the MiFriendly knowledge:

We have developed an intensive monitoring and evaluation plan to ensure that we capture and are able to share the learning from MiFriendly Cities. Each project partner will play a role in self-evaluating their activities, with CTPSR leading the evaluation activities. We will evaluate both the process of establishing MiFriendly Cities, documenting learning on an ongoing basis and co-producing solutions where needed. We will also measure the impact of our project and its constituent components through a mixed method approach: surveys combined with interviews with project participants, project staff as well as wider stakeholders. In line with the participatory ethos of the project, we will train and accredit a new

generation of Citizen Social Scientists throughout the region. Citizen Social Scientists will be awarded their certificates at a graduation ceremony hosted by the university, with the attendance of senior representatives from across the region. Scientists will be encouraged to participate in the evaluation beyond the timeline of the training, mentored and supported by academics from Coventry University.

We will disseminate learning about the MiFriendly Cities project throughout Europe and on our project website <https://mifriendlycities.co.uk>





Timeline

JUNE 2018

Laying the foundations

OCTOBER 2018

The MiFriendly partnership
structures established

APRIL 2019

Delivering our key projects
and getting the community
involved

JUNE 2020

Active citizenship and social
enterprising in MiFriendly Cities

OCTOBER 2019

MiFriendly Cities -
the progress so far

JANUARY 2021

MiFriendly Cities close
event and short film
premiere

FEBRUARY 2021

The legacy
continues...